

Montgomery council delays funding of Clarksburg bypass road

Roberts Tavern Drive would not be needed for at least 10 years, officials say

by Susan Singer-Bart | Staff Writer

The Montgomery County Council will postpone funding a road to bypass the Clarksburg Historic District because officials believe it is not needed for at least 10 years.

The council's Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee decided Thursday not to fund a detailed planning study of a portion of Roberts Tavern Drive, in the next five-year capital budget.

The road would offer a bypass around Frederick Road (Md. 355).

The study would look at the scope of the project and develop estimates of its cost, environmental impact and community impact. The study would cost \$658,000, according to Glenn Orlin, deputy council staff director.

"Our need for the money is great now; the need for the project doesn't appear so great now," said the committee chairman, Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac.

The county's Department of Transportation is finishing up a phase 1 study of the road, which cost \$332,000.

It presented its findings to the Montgomery County Planning Board in October. The board recommended starting the phase 2 study, said planning board transportation planner Ki Kim.

The Clarksburg Master Plan, written in 1994, states that Frederick Road through the historic district should be a two-lane street designed to serve local traffic only. Roberts Tavern Road would intersect with Frederick Road south of the historic district and meet Observation Drive in a T-intersection at the west end.

Observation Drive north of Stringtown Road is not built and when the state realigns Frederick Road, the realignment will involve some reconstruction of Roberts Tavern Drive, Orlin said.

The phase 1 study found the road will carry fewer than 200 vehicles per hour during the morning and afternoon peak hours 20 years from now, unless Observation Drive is extended north of Stringtown Road to meet Frederick Road. Until that is done, Roberts Tavern Drive would be a local road, not a bypass.

The completion of Observation Drive will be ready for funding next year, Orlin said.

"That will make a difference," he said.

The master plan reason for Roberts Tavern Drive has been compromised by a section of the road that was built by a developer. Developers are responsible for building many roads in Clarksburg. The developer-built section created a 90-degree kink in the road where it intersects with Observation Drive. Houses would have to be moved to realign the road.

‘It's just an itty bitty, teeny weenie piece — it's hard to get excited about this," said Councilwoman Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park. "What I am concerned about is the Clarksburg infrastructure. It's a serious concern for us in terms of traffic capacity."

Right of way is still reserved for the road, Orlin said.

The council had budgeted \$253,000 for the study in fiscal 2011, and planned to spend \$90,000 in fiscal 2012 and \$315,000 in fiscal 2013 on the road, he said. The money will be returned to the county's general fund, Orlin said.

"It could be used to offset other cost in the savings plan," he said.

Construction of Roberts Tavern Drive will cost \$6 million to \$8 million.